LANDLORDISM

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LANDLORDISM:

IN ITS MORAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

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BY

DAVID SYME.

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[*Reprinted from the* "WESTMINSTER REVIEW."]

LONDON:
TRÜBNER AND CO., 8 & 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1871.

Price One Shilling.

LONDON :
SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

LANDLORDISM:

IN ITS MORAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

THE contrast between England of the fifteenth and England of the nineteenth century in regard to the tenure and occupation of the land is positively startling. At the former period, according to Chancellor Fortescue, England was noted throughout Europe for the number of her freeholders and for the general prosperity of her inhabitants. "The country," he tells us, "was then so filled and replenished with landed men, that therein so small a little hamlet cannot be found where dwelleth not a knight, an esquire, or such a householder as is there called a Franklin, enriched with great possessions, and also other freeholders and other yeomen. . . . . After this manner are none other realms of this world disposed and inhabited. For though there be in them men of great power, of great riches and possessions, yet they dwell not nigh one to another as such great men do in England; neither so many inheritors and possessors of land are elsewhere as in England."* Two centuries later, according to Gregory King's estimate, the small freeholders were still a very numerous body. In 1688 there were in England 40,000 families "freeholders of the better sort," and 140,000 "freeholders of the lesser sort; in all 180,000 families possessing freehold estates. This is exclusive of the higher nobility, baronets, knights, esquires, and gentlemen, who are classified separately and number 16,560 families, all of which were the owners of land more or less. Taking therefore Gregory King's estimate of the total number of families of all ranks and conditions at 849,000, it would appear that one family in every four were freeholders at the time he lived. How different the state of things at the present day, when one-half of England is owned by 150, and 19½ millions of acres in Scotland are owned by 12 persons!†

The facts stated imply a great and radical change. The

* "De Laudibus Legum Angliæ," cap. 29-36.

† The total number of landowners in England at the date of the last census was 30,766; but this includes the owners of building sites, town and suburban allotments.

question arises:—Has this change been beneficial or otherwise? Is employment, in proportion to population, more abundant? Is labour, taking other things into account, better remunerated? Are the people as a whole more prosperous than formerly, in regard to their material comforts and social condition? These questions, we fear, cannot be answered in the affirmative. On the contrary, it must be admitted that the change has been an unfortunate, and in many respects, a disastrous one for the country.

It is not a mere coincidence that the introduction of pauperism in England was contemporaneous with the extinction of the class of small freeholders and farmers. The connexion between them was that of cause and effect. In England, in former days, the nobility, it is true, held large estates, but they did not monopolize the whole land of the country. Between each large estate there were numerous small freeholds, owned and cultivated by a class of yeomen; while at the same time large spaces all over the country were specially reserved from appropriation, and set apart for the common use of the people. The small freeholds began to be absorbed into the large estates about the middle of the fifteenth century. About the same time a great demand arose for wool. English wool was then in great repute all over Europe for manufacturing purposes, and the price was so high that the landowners found it more profitable to grow wool than any other kind of agricultural produce. With a view to meet the increased demand for this article, immense areas of land were laid down in pasture all over the country. But land laid down in pasture employs less labour than if devoted to tillage; and thousands of labourers were consequently thrown out of employment. When remonstrated with for the course they were taking in depriving so many people of a livelihood, the landowners, in terms which express the now prevailing notions with regard to the rights of property, replied—"Have we not a right to do as we like with our own?" and carried the day. Large and small farms alike were appropriated to pasture, and the fate of the small farmer was sealed. The clearance system was then for the first time adopted, and it was remorselessly carried out. .. "As for turning men out of a hold," says a writer of this period,* "they take it for no offence, but say the land is their own, and so they turn them out of their strouds like mice. Thousands in England through such beg now from door to door, who have kept honest houses." Again, the author of a tract published in 1581 says, "Sheep are the causes of our mischief; they have driven husbandry out of the country; now it is alto-

* Bernard Gilpin, in Strype's "Ecclesiastical Memorials."

gether sheep, sheep, sheep! I have known a dozen of ploughs within six miles abandoned, laid down within seven years; and where threescore persons and upwards had their livings, now one man with his cattle hath all." But the evil had become serious long before this, for in 1489 we find the Legislature, recognising the fact that land, unlike other property, was not to be used for the exclusive benefit of the owner, had enacted a statute providing that all farmhouses should be maintained with a competent quantity of land, under penalty of seizure of half the profits. Again, the 25th of Henry VIII. declared that the accumulations of farms had reduced "a vast multitude" of the people to poverty and misery, and forbade any man to have more than two farms, or to keep on hired land more than two thousand sheep; and the 5th and 6th of Edward VI. required that as much land should be kept in tillage as had heretofore been the case. Shocking evidences these, it will be said, of the ignorance of our ancestors as to the first principles of political economy. However, one way or another, the process of accumulation went on till there were few small freeholds left in the country. Then the commons began to disappear. From 1670 till 1867 no less than 7,000,000 of acres of common had been swallowed up by the Enclosure Acts, and gone to increase the already large estates of adjoining proprietors. As the work of accumulation proceeded on the one hand, so did the impoverishment of the people on the other, till the net result showed itself in the hideous shape of pauperism, which was formally recognised* by the Act of Parliament in the reign of Elizabeth, when the poor rates were made compulsory.

Note next the effect of the system on our agricultural population. In the good old days of English husbandry the farmer and his men lived under the same roof, ate at the same table, and joined in the same amusements. If we take Chancellor Fortescue as an authority, they had plenty of all kinds of flesh and fish to eat, something stronger than water to drink, and wore "fine woollen cloth in all their apparel." † The farmers of

* The Act 43 Eliz. passed in 1601, just 270 years ago. There are no means of arriving at the gross amount expended in poor rates since that period, as no regular returns were obtained previous to the present century, but the amount must have been enormous.

† "I should find it difficult," says Hallam, "to resist the conclusion, that however the labourer has derived benefit from the cheapness of manufactured commodities, and from many inventions of common utility, he is much inferior in ability to support a family to his ancestors three or four centuries ago. I know not why some have supposed meat was a luxury seldom obtained by the labourer. Doubtless he could not have procured as much as he pleased, but from the greater cheapness of cattle as compared with corn, it seems to follow that a more considerable portion of his ordinary diet consisted of animal food

those days and their men were on a par also in point of education, intelligence, or social position. But the farmer of that period has become extinct, and only the labourer remains. And what of him? Have long years of training in the art of husbandry made the hired servant of to-day a more skilful husbandman—a more efficient labourer than he was in the past? Is he not, on the contrary, as ignorant, as stupid, and as generally inefficient as a man well can be? without a desire to advance himself, as he is without the opportunities of advancement! Is it not a standing grievance at agricultural gatherings that the one great difficulty farmers have to contend with, in their endeavours to keep pace with the times, is the intense stupidity of the agricultural labourer? A few facts will go far to explain the degeneracy, physical and mental, of our rural population. In the year 1863 the Privy Council directed a medical inquiry to be made into the food of the poorer classes in England; and Mr. Simon, the gentleman appointed to conduct the inquiry, found, on actual examination, a very alarming deficiency. The standard adopted was that obtained from experience during the Lancashire cotton famine, under the influence of which "starvation diseases," as they are called, were proved to supervene. This standard, in the case of a man, was 4300 grains of carbon and 200 grains of nitrogen. Now, as regards the agricultural population, it was found that more than a fifth had less than the estimated bare sufficiency of carbonaceous food, and that more than a third had less than the estimated bare sufficiency of nitrogenous food; and that in the three purely agricultural counties, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Somersetshire insufficiency of nitrogenous food was the average diet.* Read by the light of these facts, can we be surprised at the deterioration that has taken place among our agricultural population? The wonder is rather that they are so good as

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than at present. It was remarked by Sir John Fortescue, that the English lived far more upon animal diet than their rivals the French, and it was natural to ascribe their superior strength and courage to this cause."—*History of the Middle Ages*, vol. iii. p. 374.

* "We are curious to know," says Mr. Caird, "how money was economized, and heard from a labourer the following account of a day's diet:—After doing up his horses he takes breakfast, which is made of flour with a little butter, and water 'from the tea-kettle' poured over it. He takes with him to the field a piece of bread and (if he has not a young family and can afford it) cheese to eat at midday. He returns home in the afternoon to a few potatoes, and possibly a little bacon, though only those who are a little better off can afford this. The supper very commonly consists of bread and water. The appearance of the labourer showed, as might be expected from such a meagre diet, a want of that vigour and activity which mark the well-fed ploughman of the northern and midland counties."—*English Agriculture*, pp. 84, 85.

they are. We have got rid of the yeoman and small farmer class, are we not in a fair way of getting rid of the agricultural labourer also, by the slow but terribly sure method of sheer starvation? Let it be asked in all seriousness if a system which produces such results as these can be a right one? Can we say that it is creditable to our humanity that a large and important section of our fellow-creatures should actually be kept on the point of starvation while able and willing to work for a living?

So much for the physical condition of the agricultural labourer. His mental condition is no better. It is vain to talk to him of the necessity of life insurance, annuities for old age, or for making a provision for his wife and children. He barely manages to obtain subsistence from day to day, and all his efforts are devoted to that one object. Life with him is a constant "struggle for existence." To talk of educating him under such circumstances is absurd. He has neither the time nor the means for indulging in such a luxury, and his children are not likely to be any better off than himself in this respect. Bad as is his condition in the present, his future prospects are still worse. The next grade above him is too high for him ever to have a chance of reaching it. He has no ambition because he has no hope. He must drudge on in his own dull way to the dreary end, and that end is the gaol or the workhouse.

With the lower stratum of society in such a state of physical and mental degradation, we need not wonder at the prevalence of crime. Physical privation means moral degradation. Insufficiency of food implies deficiency of everything that is necessary to the comfort and decency of domestic life. Can we expect the moral condition of those to be otherwise than low whose constant care it is to earn a bare subsistence? Unfortunately we are not left to infer that such is the case. We are supplied with an overwhelming mass of evidence on this point which puts the matter beyond dispute.* This evidence proves but too conclusively that crime and immorality prevail in England to an alarming extent. If we are to believe the official reports that have from time to time been laid before Parliament, if we are to believe the statements of clergymen who have had ample opportunities of ascertaining the condition of the several parishes in which they reside, or of gentlemen well known for their truthfulness and philanthropy, then in-

* See especially the Report on the Employment of Women in Agriculture; Mr. Chadwick's Report on the Sanatory Condition of the Labouring Population; the Report of the Welsh Commissioners; and Reports of the Poor Law Commissioners.

deed we cannot resist the conclusion that this country has reached a depth of degradation that is perfectly appalling.* An agricultural labourer's cottage sometimes contains three, but oftener only two rooms, and in a great many cases only one room, which is used as a living and sleeping chamber for the whole family. Sometimes in an ordinary sized room there may be found sleeping in close proximity father and mother and grown-up sons and daughters. It is said not to be an uncommon thing even to find young men received as lodgers where only one room is available for the whole family. The consequence of this state of things on the rising generation may be imagined. In some parishes the number of illegitimate children exceeds that of those born in wedlock. At first the public were horrified at these disclosures. They looked to the landowners for the removal of the scandal; but the landowners did not see it in the same light, and did nothing. For months the press kept publishing details that opened the eyes of the public to the enormity of the system which produced such a state of things. But soon the tale began to pall upon the public appetite; and the *Times*, which had taken a prominent part in the exposure, was the first to recognise the fact. On one occasion, after drawing attention in its leading columns to some more striking proofs of the depravity of the rural population than it had yet published, that paper expressed a fear that to call farther attention to the subject was "calculated to deaden rather than excite the anxiety of the public by a thrice-told tale." And so the matter dropped. This was years ago; but nothing has since been done to remedy the evils then complained of. To insufficient accommodation is now superadded the infamous gang system. Young children of both sexes, in charge of men of loose character, are led about from farm to farm in gangs; by day working in the fields, and at night sleeping in sheds and outhouses. Can we doubt but that the work of demoralization commenced in the cottage will be easily consummated in the field? Our criminal class is but another evil fruit of the seed we have sown. It is the ultimatum of social degeneracy towards which we have been travelling ever since the ejection

* S. G. O., in a letter to the *Times* newspaper, says:—"Sad and lengthened experience has convinced me that the producer of bread by the sweat of his brow, for his body's sake and his soul's sake, can be placed in no worse position than he is at home—in merry England, Christian England, England the nurse of industry, the very hotbed of philanthropy. Late, very late experience—knowledge acquired far and near, from those in whom I can put trust—facts of which I am cognizant from sources which defy contradiction—all prove to me that in hundreds of our villages the social condition of man is below that of any country of which I have ever read."

of the small freeholders and small farmers,—pauperism and the chronic starvation of agricultural labourers being but intermediate steps in the process.

Not only is our present land system responsible for the deterioration of our farm labourers, and in a great measure for the advance of pauperism and crime, but to it we are indebted for the ever-increasing burden of taxation. According to the law of England, the land belongs to the Crown. When originally granted to private individuals, its tenure was subject to certain conditions, generally of military service, and it was resumable by the Crown if these conditions were not complied with. In those days the land was the only source of revenue for the State. It provided for the poor, maintained justice, supported armies, and bore all the imposts of the community.

"The early European system," says Hallam, "knew neither the necessities nor the ingenuities of modern finance. From the demesne lands the Kings of France and Lombardy supplied the common expenses of a barbarous court. Even Charlemagne regulated the economy of his farms with the minuteness of a steward, and a large portion of his capitularies are directed to this object. Their actual revenue was chiefly derived from free gifts made according to an ancient German custom, at the annual assemblies of the nation, from amercements paid by the allodial proprietors for default of military service, and from the freda, or fines accruing to the judges out of composition for murder. These amounted to one-third of the whole weregild; one-third of this was paid over by the court to the royal exchequer. After the feudal government prevailed in France, and neither the heribannum nor the weregild continued in use, there seem to have been hardly any sources of regular revenue besides the domainal estates of the crown."*

From the meanest vassal to the proudest noble all had a personal and material interest in the soil; and in proportion to the extent and fertility of the land held by each, were his obligations to the State increased or diminished. The feudal system was at least an equitable one, which is more than can be said of the one we have substituted in its place. Military service was then, in the strictest sense, a rent-charge on the land; the lords of the soil were simply tenants of the Crown, neither more nor less. Now, however, since military tenures have been abolished, and the expenditure of the Government is maintained by a general system of taxation, we do not find that the rents have reverted to the State. Modern landowners claim the rights, but have taken good care to disown the obligations, of their position. They had adroitly managed to relieve themselves of their burdens by transferring them to the shoulders of the people; and,

* "Middle Ages," vol. i. p. 208.

being legislators as well as landowners, they found little difficulty in giving the sanction of the law to their proceedings. In the first place, they substituted a pecuniary assessment for military service, and then made the assessment so low that it was found necessary to supplement it. In other words they retained their rents and provided a substitute in the shape of customs and excise duties.

Pauperism, as we now understand it, had no existence under the feudal system. The poor were provided for in those days, but not out of the pockets of the ratepayers. Under the feudal system there were no rights without corresponding duties. The vassals gave their services, and in return the lord apportioned them land, and afforded them the benefit of his protection. But under the process of that revolution by which they came in time to claim their land as their own property, the landowners not only created pauperism, but contrived to cast upon others the duty of its relief. The law of settlement practically confined the poor to the place of their birth and all that the owners of property required to do in order to escape payment of the rates, was to take care that there should be no poor people living on their estates. Nor have they been slow to take advantage of the law in this respect. Systematically they have proceeded with the work of ejectment. All over the country the labourers' cottages have been pulled down, and their late occupants driven to seek shelter in the nearest village or town, where they have to pay exorbitant rents for miserable hovels. The town or village may be miles distant from the scene of his labours, and in addition to his day's work, the labourer has the task of walking to and from his work without any additional compensation being allowed him. Thus he is turned out of his home, his hours of labour are increased, he is compelled to pay a higher rent for worse accommodation, and all the while his wages remain the same as before. What if the labouring poor can only find shelter in crowded and squalid dwellings in the lanes and alleys of our towns and villages, where health is unknown? The result is achieved: the landowners get rid of the poor rates; the tradesmen and shopkeepers of those towns and villages have to maintain the crowds of people thrown on their hands, to multiply in a state of ignorance, disease, vice, and finally, to give birth to an army of criminals so numerous and so dangerous to the community, that the public are at their wits' end how to deal with them.

Another evil attending our land system is, that while the land itself is constantly increasing in value, we have no corresponding contributions from that increase in aiding to defray our public expenditure. If the land in feudal times, when the soil was cul-

tivated in the rudest manner, was able to maintain its poor and defray all the expenses of State, ordinary and extraordinary, why should it not do as much now, with all our scientific acquirements, our steam ploughs and thrashing machines, our improved live stock, and our vast and varied experience of the capabilities of our soil and climate? To this it will no doubt be answered that the population of the country has largely increased since the period referred to; that a comparatively small proportion of the population is now engaged in agriculture, and that it is but right that those other classes of the community who may be following industrial and commercial pursuits, should contribute their fair share to the public revenue. We admit the fact as to the increased population, and the comparatively small proportion engaged in agriculture; nor do we dispute the justness of the argument that the industrial classes should bear their fair share of public taxation. It is forgotten, however, by those who put forward this plea, that the value of land has increased in quite as great a ratio as the population; that the land has derived additional value from this increase of population, and is now quite as able as it ever was to meet all the demands that may be made upon it.* It may be alleged, indeed, that this in-

* Gregory King estimated the population of England and Wales in 1688 at 849,000 families, and reckoning 5½ persons to a family will give a total of 4,669,500; and he estimates the annual income from landed property at this period as follows:—From land 10,000,000*l.*; burgage or houseing, 2,000,000*l.*; all other hereditaments, 1,000,000*l.*; making a total of 13,000,000*l.* According to the census of 1861, the population of England and Wales was 20,061,725, and the return under Schedule A. of the income-tax at the same period was 120,069,903*l.* Between the two periods, therefore, there was an increase of 429 per cent. in population, while there was an increase of no less than 923 per cent. in real property. In other words, the value of real property increased at more than double the rate of population. Take another comparison. Mr. Caird found, from actual observation, that the rents for arable land and labourers' cottages in the agricultural districts of England had, since the period of Arthur Young's visit, risen exactly 100 per cent. Arthur Young made his tour in 1770, and Mr. Caird his in 1851, just eighty years after. We have no means of ascertaining the actual population in England and Wales in 1770, as no census had been taken for some time before or after that date; but we know it to have been 17,927,609 in 1851, and we also know that the decennial rate of increase in the population has for a long period been, as nearly as possible, 14 per cent. If therefore we take eight decennial periods at this rate, we shall find the increase during the eighty years to have been 112 per cent. as against 100 per cent. increase in the rents. But we know for a fact that by far the largest proportion of this increase of population has taken place in the metropolitan and manufacturing, and little if any in the agricultural districts. Between the census of 1851 and 1861, for instance, three-fourths of the whole increase took place in the towns, and the purely agricultural districts showed a decrease. Cambridge and Rutland decreased 5 per cent.; Norfolk, Wilts, and Suffolk, 2 per cent.; Anglesea and Montgomery, in Wales, also sustained a loss. If therefore arable land increased in

crease is due to the enterprise of the landlords. This is not the case, however. Increased value is no doubt given to land by what are called improvements, which are made sometimes by (1) the landlord, as when Mr. Smith of Deanston, by a thorough system of drainage, increased the rents of his estate from 15*s.* to 40*s.* an acre. (2) More frequently they are made by the tenants, as in Scotland, when they have long leases, and in almost every case have greatly improved the leaseholds by a large expenditure in manuring, subsoiling, and draining. Rents in the lowlands have risen of late from 10 to 20 per cent., chiefly from this cause. In Ireland, under another form of tenure, the small farmers have reclaimed large estates from their original bog or heather, erected the necessary fences, dwellings, and farm-buildings by their own labour, and in many cases thereby doubled and trebled the value of the land.* (3) By corporate bodies in constructing works of public utility, such as harbours, common roads, canals, and especially railways. (4) By the Government, as in France, Belgium, and the continental states generally, in the construction of railways; and as in India by the construction of roads, railways, and works of irrigation. Whatever, in fact, increases the fertility of the soil on the one hand, or decreases the cost of production on the other, proportionately increases the value of the land.

But there is a natural as well as an artificial process of raising the value of land. In a country where there is no population to consume its produce, and no means of transporting that produce to be consumed elsewhere, any expenditure of labour or capital in improving the land would be sheer waste, as land under such circumstances would have no value whatever. It is population, with its necessities, which in the first instance gives land its value. In the earlier stages of society a few wandering tribes occupy a large territory, and land is almost valueless. As population increases land is more appreciated, and flocks and

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eighty years 100 per cent. in value, we may safely assume, if we did not know it for a fact, that near the great centres of population, where the pressure was the greatest, the value of the land had proportionately increased.

* "The Irish landlords, partly politically and partly to obtain additional rent by means of the potato, encouraged or (what was enough, without active encouragement) permitted subdivision and the increase of population. The inhabitants of Ireland, from 4,088,226 in 1792, rose to 8,175,124 in 1841. The landlords were unable or unwilling to expend money on their estates. They allowed the tenants themselves to make the provision by building and reclaiming land from its original state of bog, or heather, or stony field, necessary to lodge and feed this increased population. It is thus that many estates have been created, and almost all have been enlarged by generation after generation of tenants without assistance. It was the tenants who made the barony of Ferney, originally worth 3000*l.* a year, worth 50,000*l.* a year."—*Ireland, Journals, Conversations, and Essays*, by N. W. Senior, vol. ii. p. 240.

herds supersede the less useful animals of the chase. After a further increase of the population, and when cultivation has been resorted to, a new and distinct value is given to the land. As yet, however, it is not a saleable commodity, for where every one has as much of it as he can use, there is little or no demand, consequently no purchasers, and no rent, as rent only becomes possible when a still further increase of population renders the supply inadequate to the demand. It is evident therefore that population is the source of all value in land. Without population there can be no market for agricultural produce, and without a market the produce and the land from which it is raised are alike valueless. The farther removed the land is from a market, the less is its value; the nearer and better the market, the more valuable the land. In the Western States of America land is cheap and population sparse; as you proceed towards the seaboard population becomes denser, and land more valuable. In Australia, it is said, land near centres of population is let as high as 7*s*., 10*s*., and even 20*s*. an acre, the tenant fencing and clearing the land, and making all the necessary improvements; while equally good land is in the interior, but at a distance from market, let as low as twopence and threepence an acre. Here it is clear that population alone gives value to the land.

The landowner, in fact, need not expend a shilling on improvements. He may neglect his property, he may be an absentee, still its value goes on increasing with the increase of population. In the same manner the tenant would not be able to pay a high rent for the use of his farm unless he got a corresponding high price for his produce. On the consumers therefore falls the burden of high rents. Thus Mr. Caird found that while the rent of land in the districts he visited had increased 100 per cent. during the eighty years previous, the price of meat had also increased 70 per cent., and the price of butter and wool 100 per cent. during the same period. It is evident therefore that if the land belonged to the State instead of to private individuals, as in England, income and expenditure would be self-adjusting, increased expenditure caused by increased population would be met by a corresponding increase in the rents from land. By a wise and beneficent adaptation of nature, the land is really capable of meeting all the demands that society, enlarged and elevated, may make upon it. The rule is, the greater the demand the greater the supply. As in nature, the greater the evaporation the more copious is the dewfall; the heavier the crop (so long as it is not carried off the ground) the more is the fertilizing of the soil increased. In the tropics, where vegetation is most luxuriant, the soil is the richest, every successive crop only serving to increase its fertility. As the plant by its roots takes

up food from the soil, so does it by its leaves from the atmosphere. Agriculture extracts wealth from the soil, but with manufactures an accession of population becomes necessary, and then a new source of wealth is added to that already in existence, and both help to enrich the soil that supports them.

Another evil resulting from our land system is the stagnation of agriculture. No one can say that agriculture in England is in a satisfactory condition at the present day. It certainly has not kept pace with manufacturing industry. In the manufacture of cotton and woollen goods, of cutlery, of steam engines, and a thousand other articles, England stands unrivalled. She supplies the world with the products of her workshops, but she cannot raise food enough for her own people. England is now the largest grain-importing country in the world, though for centuries she not only supplied herself with breadstuffs, but was also a large exporter of wheat long after the bounty system had been abolished. Within less than a century France has quadrupled her agricultural produce,* while England, according to the most eminent authorities, now produces less grain by about two millions of quarters than she did in 1770, when Arthur Young made his estimate.† The two principal Channel Islands, where the holdings are small and well cultivated, the agricultural population is in the one twice, and in the other three times as dense as in England, and the non-agricultural population respectively four and five times as dense, yet they not only produce food enough for their own consumption, but annually export large quantities to England. It has been proved beyond doubt that in Belgium, Holland, the Rhine Provinces, Saxony, Lombardy, and Switzerland, the soil is better cultivated, the gross produce and net profits greater, and (the real test) the land commands a higher price, than in England, with her large population and vast accumulated wealth, while at the same time the cultivators in those countries are better fed, better educated, and in every respect more prosperous than the same class with us.‡

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* Lavergne's "Rural Economy of England," p. 144.

† Caird's "English Agriculture," p. 523.

‡ It is usual with a certain class of writers, when treating of this subject, to argue that, as it is necessary to buy in order to sell, if we do not purchase, say wheat from the United States, the United States has not the means of buying manufactured goods from us. But if this argument is good for anything, why not reduce still more the quantity of home-grown wheat, or even cease to grow it altogether, and so enable our transatlantic cousins to purchase more of our manufactures? Or if supply and demand have already become so nicely adjusted, had we not better cease producing any more, lest we should disturb the equilibrium? But suppose we have arrived at such a nice adjustment, would it not be better to have our own population in the double capacity of producers and consumers, and thereby develop to the utmost the resources

The full effects of this stagnation in agriculture it is impossible to estimate. We can only reason from analogy. We know the effects of a bad harvest, as it comes home to the experience of every one. It influences the rate of discount, injures national credit, checks enterprise, and lowers the rate of wages. A good harvest, on the other hand, means cheap food, cheap money, new enterprises, increased demand for labour, and high wages. If these are the ordinary results of a single harvest, good or bad, it is easy to imagine the consequences that would follow a succession of such; in other words, from a permanent increase or decrease of the means of subsistence. There is no reason why England at this moment should not supply food enough, and more than enough for her own population. There is no want of land, for out of the 77½ millions of acres in the United Kingdom, only 45½ millions are under cultivation or in permanent grass, the remaining 32 millions are lying waste, though fully one-half is capable of cultivation. There is no want of capital, for English capital is going a begging all over the world.* There are tens of thousands of acres of land in Canada, in Australia, and other Colonial possessions, in which English capital has been invested to the extent of 40*l.* or 50*l.* an acre, which are now growing grain for the English market. And Heaven knows there is no deficiency of labour. At the present moment there are said to be no less than 150,000 able-bodied poor amongst us whom it would be a charity to turn to some profitable account. Just imagine the wealth that all the labour now going to waste might create! Why, it is not far short of the total of the able-bodied population of the colony of Victoria, who raise an annual revenue of 3,000,000*l.*, and own rateable property of the value of over 40,000,000*l.*, nearly the whole of which has been acquired in less than half a generation. But we must add to these 150,000 able-bodied paupers the number of able-bodied labourers who are continually going about in search of work, those employed on half time, and the criminal class in penal servitude, altogether making an unemployed able-bodied population of something like a million. What if increased production did lead to low prices? Are we to keep down production in order to keep up prices? Is it nothing that the standard of living throughout the country would be raised, and that the means of

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within our reach and under our own control, and save the cost of transportation both ways? The latter, at all events, would be a clear gain.

* In a recent number of "The Money Market Review" it is estimated that 50,000,000*l.* of English capital are invested in foreign railways; 110,000,000*l.* in colonial railways; 200,000,000*l.* in Indian and colonial debts; 400,000,000*l.* in foreign stocks, besides an unknown amount in foreign banks, insurance, steam navigation, dock, plantation, land and mining companies.

subsistence would be within the reach of thousands who can now barely keep body and soul together? And would not cheap food, which is so essential to cheap production, enable us to maintain our present pre-eminence in manufacturing industry, now endangered by the high price of provisions?

The present system is, moreover, an unwarrantable monopoly in an era of free-trade, and a mischievous absolutism in a free State. We cannot believe we are in our proper position as a people while we allow a large part of our population to starve, our resources to be wasted, and the land, which should contribute to the wealth of the nation, misappropriated in the manner it is at this moment. Unlike an ordinary commodity, land cannot be increased in quantity at pleasure. Its ownership is a monopoly. We pride ourselves on being a free people, but we submit to an absolutism on the part of the landowners which is a disgrace to our civilization. A landowner in this country is endowed with more than sovereign power. A sovereign reigns for the good of his people, a landowner for his own pleasure and profit. The public may concern themselves much about the rights of property, but the owners of property need not give themselves the slightest trouble about the interests of the public. Blackstone says that, "every Englishman may claim a right to abide in his own country so long as he pleases, and not be driven from it, except by sentence of the law," but times have changed since Blackstone's day. The landowner is the man in possession, and possession is nine-tenths of the law. The land is his, and he may do exactly what he likes with it. He may refuse to sell, let, or allow any one to occupy it. He may consign a whole county to the solitude of a deer forest. He may clear a large territory of its population as he would exterminate vermin when they become troublesome. Fifteen thousand souls, without respect to age, sex, or condition, and for no fault of their own, were turned out of the Sutherland estates in the early part of the present century. And this barbarity was committed in open day, and in the name of law! But if one landowner can act in this manner, why not all; and since all the land is owned by some one or other, where are we to draw the line? And if landlords have, as they maintain, legal right to do so, it is clear that the English people exist merely on the sufferance of the landowners, who are truly masters of the situation, and that as a nation we have no *locus standi*, no common inheritance, no territorial rights whatever.

It will be found, if we examine the subject more closely, that our notions of private property in land are altogether peculiar. The alienation of the public territory to individual proprietors is a modern innovation. The bare idea of alienation is repugnant

to three-fourths of the human race. To the American Indian, North and South, to the New Zealander, the South Sea Islander, the aborigines of Africa and Australia, the idea is altogether incomprehensible. To their unsophisticated notions the land appears to be as necessary to their existence as the air they breathe. The idea of its absolute, permanent alienation never entered their minds, as they cannot conceive of the existence of the tribe or nation apart from the soil.

Individual ownership of the soil is as repugnant to the civilized mind as to the savage—to the semi-barbarous nationalities of the West, as to the luxurious civilization of the East. Thus in Peru, in the time of the Incas, there are no traces of individual proprietary interest in the soil. We find there existed in that country a threefold division of the public territory. One part was appropriated to the sun, another to the Inca, and a third to the people. The lands apportioned to the sun were for the support of the temples, the maintenance of public worship, and the support of the priesthood. Those reserved for the Inca were for the support of the State, and the numerous members of the royal household. The remainder of the lands was divided into equal shares among the people.* The division of the soil was renewed every year, and the possessions of the tenant were increased or diminished according to the size of his family. All three divisions of the soil were cultivated by the people. First, the lands belonging to the sun were attended to; next those of the old, the sick, the widows and orphans, and soldiers engaged in actual warfare; then those belonging to the people; and last of all, those of the Inca. But the produce of all the lands set apart for the Inca, as well as those consecrated to the sun, were deposited in the public storehouses, and remained there as provisions for times of scarcity.† In Mexico, also, we are told,‡ the people held the lands in common, and alienation was unknown.

In the same manner the land among the ancient Teutonic nations belonged to the tribe or nation. "A division of soil," says Professor Newman, "was made almost identical with that of ancient Egypt or India into three sorts of land, belonging to the Crown, the priests, and military order, that is, the nobles. The actual cultivators generally paid rent in some form to one or other of these possessors; but the principle was on the whole

* Prescott's "History of the Conquest of Peru," pp. 20, 21.

† "Robertson's "History of America," Works, vol. i. p. 234. An unfruitful season was thus more effectually provided for than by the modern discovery of free imports, which leaves the supply in a great measure to chance.

‡ Prescott's "History of the Conquest of Mexico," p. 31.

clearly upheld that the land belonged to the State, and to no private person."

Among the Slavonian races private property in land was unknown until recently. "The idea of a private right of property in the soil," says Baron Haxthausen, "is foreign to the ideas and manners of the people; the extensive districts of Russia have always been regarded as the property of the nation, to the usufruct of which an equal right belongs to every individual. It follows as a natural consequence from this idea, that there is no private property in the soil, no right of inheritance, nor even a life or temporary right or usufruct in any definite share of the land. The principle which sprang from the original nomadic life of the people remained after their gradual settlement through all the phases of Russian history. The people settled upon the land and formed family communes, cultivating as much of it as they required: the country was large, and no one set limits to his neighbours, nor was it necessary at first to think of fixed boundaries. But when the country became gradually cultivated, limitations began to appear, and boundaries of the separate communes were necessarily constituted. These were established by the heads of the families, the chiefs of the country, and ultimately by the Czar. A kind of property, or at all events an exclusive possession by the communes of their territory, was thus gradually created. But however definite it may have been as a limit between individuals and communes, it never became a stable private right of possession or genuine property, independent of the head of the race or Czar, but was always regarded as a permission or assigned right. Within the communes the principle prevailed that no private property belonged to the individual, but only a temporary share in the usufruct."*

In ancient Egypt the soil belonged exclusively to the sovereign. Herodotus tells us, that Sesostris "made a division of the soil of Egypt among the inhabitants, assigning square plots of ground of equal size to all, and obtaining his chief revenue from the rent which the holders were required to pay him every year. If the river carried away any portion of a man's lot, he appeared before the king and related what had happened, upon which the king sent persons to determine by measurement the exact extent of loss, and thenceforth only such a rent was demanded of him as was proportionate to the reduced size of the land."† The same system of tenure is in force in Egypt at the present day; and so tenacious are the rulers of that country of their right of control over the soil, that the late Pacha dispossessed of their lands

* "The Russian Empire," vol. ii., English ed. 1856, p. 393, 4.
† "Herodotus," book ii. c. 109. Rawlinson's translation.

almost all private proprietors, allotting as a partial compensation to each, a pension for life proportioned to the extent of land taken from them.*

In Turkey the land is held under four different forms of tenure. There are—1. Mori, or Crown lands; 2. Vacouf, or pious foundations; 3. Malikaneh, or Crown grants; 4. Mulki, or freehold property. The first forms by far the largest portion of the territory, and is held direct from the Crown. The right to cultivate any particular portion of land is conceded on the payment to the Crown of a stipulated rent, and the land so held may be transmitted from father to son, but cannot be alienated on any account whatsoever. The Sultan continues to exercise the rights of seigniory over such land, and if the holder neglect to cultivate it for a period of three years, it is liable to be forfeited. The second form of tenure was obtained by grants from the sovereign for religious and educational purposes, and is entailed. The third kind was originally granted to the sophis, or old feudal troops, in recompense for stipulated military services, and is hereditary, and, like the former, is exempt from taxation. The last form of tenure, and that which exists to the smallest extent, is freehold, and is entirely confined to house property in towns and land in the immediate vicinity.

In India, from time immemorial the ownership of the soil has been vested in the State. The sovereign was the landlord, and the cultivators the tenants. The land was held on the communal system, as in Russia, each community containing within itself all the elements of self-government. The village community was governed by the headman, who collected the rents from the cultivators, and paid them to the representative of the sovereign. And this is the general system of land tenure throughout India at the present day, the Anglo-Indian Government being *de facto* landlord of the whole territory under its sway; but it was long before the English rulers understood the exact nature of the land tenure in that country. The zemindars who collected the rents in a particular district, were regarded by them as the real owners, corresponding to our landlords. It was not understood that when the zemindars collected the rents they did not keep them, but handed them over to their sovereign, after deducting a per-centage for collection, which enabled them to live in splendour.† The importance of the land revenue to the Government of India may be imagined from the fact, that it forms the principal portion of the national income. Even now, notwithstanding the waste and mismanagement inevitable where

* Lane's "Modern Egyptians," vol. i. p. 194.
† Mill's "History of British India," vol. i. p. 217.

the rents are assessed and collected by strangers, ignorant of the capabilities of the country, and of the customs of its inhabitants, the revenue from land alone, previous to the mutiny, met all the expenditure of the Empire except military charges, which, in a conquered country, are necessarily heavy. The expenditure included public works, navy, mint, interest on debt, and pensions; and if we deduct waste and alienated land, the revenue to meet this large expenditure was derived from about one-sixth of the whole territory.

So far, then, we have arrived at the following conclusions: that pauperism in England has grown with the growth of large estates; that at the same time our agricultural labourers have been reduced to a condition incompatible with the maintenance of physical strength, and in many cases to the verge of starvation; that the poorer classes, driven into the large towns, living in hovels, dens, and garrets, in darkness, ignorance, and want, constitute a breeding-ground for crime and disease; that the rent derived from the soil has been diverted from its original purpose, and appropriated by individuals to their own personal gain and advantage, to the great detriment of the public, upon whose shoulders now rests the burden of raising the revenue; that the land so appropriated has been negligently cultivated, and the produce therefrom far below the standard of other countries. In a word, the system has benefited neither tenants nor landowners, producers or consumers. Whether viewed socially or economically, it has proved disastrous to the country at large.

These conclusions are still farther confirmed by the fact, that wherever the same system has been tried it has produced results equally evil. In republican Rome the patricians seized the land of the small freeholders, and drove the dispossessed and impoverished rural population into Rome. Here they bred a pauper horde requiring to be fed by State grants, and dangerous to the commonwealth, as they ultimately proved a ready tool to be used by any ambitious general, as in the case of Marius first, and then of Cæsar. There were no State-fed paupers in Rome till the people were dispossessed of the land, and there was no need for the importation of grain until pasturage took the place of agriculture. Precisely the same consequences followed there as in England. The patricians, while they monopolized the land, contrived to evade the payment of the land tax; and the very first substitute that was attempted to be imposed in its place was a customs duty on all foreign goods imported into Italy, and an excise duty on all home produce sold in the market.*

We have already referred to the original principle prevailing

* "Gibbon," vol. i. p. 262. Milman's edition.

in Russia with regard to land. Look now at the consequences resulting from a change of principle. It was not before the commencement of the seventeenth century that the Czars began to convert the estates of the nobility, which had previously been granted for life only, into hereditary property. At the present day somewhat more than one-half of the Russian territory belongs to the nobility; and the remaining portion, called the crown provinces, to the Czar. An immense difference exists in the condition of the two portions of the empire. In the crown provinces the peasants have all along remained a free people in the full exercise of local self-government. In each commune the *starosta* levied the land-tax and delivered it to the Government; he administered all the affairs of the commune, and constituted, with the better class of people, a tribunal for deciding causes and disputes. From the earliest times the land-tax has existed in Russia, and was originally known as plough-tax, the word "plough" signifying a certain measurement of land that yielded a specific tax. This system of taxation continued in force till 1722, when, in order to facilitate computation, a poll-tax was substituted for it. Under the poll-tax, the poor were compelled to pay as much as the rich; and the natural result was a large amount of arrears, and a serious deficit in the revenue. These arrears the government from time to time remitted, but still they continued to accumulate. The system was unequal and unjust; the taxes were heavier than the poorer people could pay; the peasantry were impoverished in consequence, and the general result was a decrease of revenue and a serious decline in the trade, commerce, and agriculture of the Empire. This at length opened the eyes of the authorities. The burden of taxation had been taken off the land and put on the people, much in the same way as was done in England, and with similar effect. At the same time the richer members of the commune had gradually appropriated the village farms, and let them out to the poor peasants at exorbitant rents. In this manner the quantity of land in the hands of the peasantry was gradually diminished. In 1837 it was ascertained that nearly one million of this class had, by fraud and oppression, been deprived of their holdings, and were wandering about the country in a state of destitution. The first thing the government did was to abolish the poll-tax, and reimpose the old land-tax. This was effected in 1838. But as great numbers of the peasantry held no land, the conversion of the poll-tax into a land-tax had the effect of relieving this class from the payment of taxes altogether. It was therefore found necessary to redistribute the land among the peasantry, in order that all should contribute their fair share to the public revenue. This was accordingly done, and the hap-

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piest results followed. Within seven years after the reimposition of the land-tax, and redistribution of the land, the crown revenues had increased from thirty to forty per cent.; cultivation had increased thirty-four per cent.; the cultivation of tobacco had not only increased in quantity, but the quality and price, compared with former times, had increased sevenfold; the manufacture and sale of improved agricultural implements had increased sixfold, and the quantity imported, threefold; while at the same time the revenue from forests, pastures and waste land belonging to the Crown had nearly trebled. Such were the results of the change in the tenure of land in the crown provinces. But at this time no change had yet taken place in the land system of the provinces of the Empire, where the territorial magnates ruled supreme. Here the ancient Slavonic communal system had been destroyed, and the right of possession in the soil withdrawn from the peasants, who were reduced to a condition of serfdom. Industry continued to languish, agriculture declined; and the proportions of the country altogether presented a striking contrast to the crown provinces where the communal system had been restored to its full vigour.

"Sire," wrote Fénélon to Louis XIV., "your people, whom you ought to love as your children, and who have hitherto been so devotedly attached to you, are dying of hunger. The cultivation of the fields is almost abandoned; the towns and the country are depopulated; all trades languish and no longer support the workmen." Such was France a century before the Revolution. With the Revolution, however, came a change; the law of primogeniture was abolished, and the large estates were broken up. The effect was magical. In little more than half a century after this period, France had doubled her population and quadrupled her agricultural produce.

New England in the North, and Maryland and Virginia in the South, were both colonized about the same period by people of the same race, speaking the same language, and under a similar form of government. In the South the land was originally parcelled out into vast estates on the English model. But the early settlers, or their descendants, could do nothing with the large properties without labour, and free labour was not to be had in a country where there was no land available for settlement. Hence slavery became a necessity in the South. In the North, on the other hand, where the land was taken up in small sections by actual cultivators, slavery was unknown; wages were uniformly high, agricultural settlements made rapid progress, and the country became prosperous to an extraordinary degree.

Western Australia is the oldest free colony in the Australian group, and here the system had been adopted on an extensive

scale of giving large grants of land to the first settlers. The result was as might have been expected. The land was of no use to the settlers without labour; but free labour they could not get, and slave labour was out of the question. But labour of some sort they must have; and so, after idly waiting till all the younger Australian colonies had outstripped them in the race, the settlers of Western Australia, in the year 1849, actually petitioned the British Government to make that colony a penal settlement! Singular that in countries so different in every respect as America and Australia, the results of landlordism should be much alike. In the one country it led to slavery, and in the other to convictism. In compliance with the wishes of the settlers, Western Australia was made a penal settlement; but the other Australian colonies protested so vehemently, and even promised to do more than protest, that England was fain to give way, and seek an outlet for her convicts elsewhere.

A survey of the whole question of tenure leads to the conclusion that, wherever the land is of easy access, and widely distributed among the inhabitants of a country, the soil is well cultivated, and the people industrious, prosperous, and contented. On the other hand, wherever the land is in the hands of a few large proprietors, cultivation is checked, and the mass of the people are idle, indigent, and improvident. All suggestions or proposals of a remedial nature must be guided by this general conclusion. To find the remedy in this case, therefore, we have but to ask, what system of tenure and mode of distribution in regard to land will best promote the national welfare?

In the ordinary state of society two things are requisite for productive farming: (1) Farms must be of moderate extent, so as to be within the means of a large body of competitors; (2) and there must be security of tenure for the cultivator. Both these essentials are obtained under the peasant proprietary system. Security of tenure is perfect where the land belongs to the person who cultivates it; and small holdings are well cultivated because they are easily managed, and are within the means and capacity of the average standard of men who engage in husbandry. For one man who has capital sufficient to cultivate five hundred acres there are a hundred men who have only sufficient to cultivate fifty; and all who have had any practical experience in the management of large business concerns, may soon discover that but few working men have what is called the administrative faculty. Indeed, the old proverb, that good workmen make bad masters, is true in more senses than one. Agriculture differs essentially from manufacturing. The latter pays best when conducted on a large, the former when conducted on a small scale.

The manufacturer produces cheaper on a large than on a small scale, as with him it is simply a question of machinery. The more powerful and efficient his machinery, the smaller his expenditure in labour and management. But the soil is not like a machine, to be driven at a given rate, and to produce a given quantity of finished material in a given time. The soil has its whims and fancies, its likes and dislikes. Treated generously it will reward liberally. Every little plot of land has its own history and distinctive character of soil and situation; and each is influenced differently by the mode of cultivation, the manures, the crops, and the character of the seasons. The farmer who cultivates a small holding takes all these peculiarities into account; the farmer on a large scale ignores them. There cannot be a doubt of the fact that, as a rule, small farms are more profitable than large ones. This is the case even in England. The small farms in the western districts bring on an average a much higher rent than the large ones in the eastern counties. In Flanders, M. de Lavelaye, an eminently impartial authority, tells us "large farms constantly tend towards subdivision, for the simple reason, when subdivided they yield a higher rent." "The smaller the farm the greater the produce of the soil," he lays down as a rule which holds good all over the Continent. Lord Dufferin also may be claimed as an equally impartial authority in the case of Ireland. He frankly admits all that the advocates of *la petite culture* assert, and assert with justice, as to its being the most productive. "It no doubt has a tendency," he says, "to increase competition, and consequently to raise rents. . . . . In Ireland, before the potato failure, the large farmers, who, in virtue of their long leases, controlled in a great measure the agriculture of Ireland, became so alive to the fact that they cut up their holdings into infinitesimal plots."* The farmers in England have neither long leases, as in some parts of Ireland, nor do they cultivate their own land, as on the Continent or in the Channel Islands. As a rule they are yearly tenants, and in consequence they are slovenly farmers—a fact they are intelligent enough to know, and candid enough to acknowledge. "We are not farming,"—they frankly admitted to Mr. Caird, when remonstrated with for their backwardness—"we are not farming, and we know we are not farming; we are only taking out of the land what we can get from it at the least cost, as we do not know how long we may remain in possession, and have no security for what we might be disposed to invest in improved cultivation." Who can blame them? What man in his senses would do otherwise? Yet the popular idea is, that farming with us is conducted on the most approved scientific

* Mr. Mill's "Plan for the Pacification of Ireland," p. 22.

principles; that, with the smallest amount of expenditure of labour, the greatest possible amount of produce is obtained. There never was a greater delusion. Productive farming requires not only careful management, but large expenditure of capital. We have got beyond the antediluvian era, when a mere scratching of the soil was all that was required on the part of the agriculturist. The outcroppings of the mine have been exhausted, and to reach the rich deposits of ore underneath the surface, shafts must be sunk, adits run in, tramways laid, and steam-engines erected to pump the water from the mine and bring the coveted mineral to the surface; but all this requires capital, and capital requires security. The tenant is aware of the change that has taken place, and is prepared for the emergency. He is ready to expend his capital in the purchase of manures, improved farm implements, steam-engines, and all the stock in trade requisite for the effective working of his farm; he is even willing to undertake the landlord's duties, to drain the stiff clay, and effect other permanent improvements. But the landlord stops the way. He will neither furnish the capital himself nor allow others to do it for him. He will neither give the money nor the security, and until he is removed all hope of progress must be abandoned.

A great many plans have been proposed to give security of tenure to the cultivator, but they may be resolved into three. The first is, that the Legislature shall make it compulsory on landlords to grant leases to their tenants. This plan, if honestly carried out on the part of the landlords, would be a great improvement on the present practice; but it would not be sufficient to meet all the requirements of the case. Long before the expiration of the lease, if it became known that it would not be renewed, or a new one agreed upon, the tenant would begin to work out his land, so that by the time the lease actually fell in, the soil would be so impoverished that it would take years to recover its fertility. This is the practice at present all over the world where leases exist, and it is ruinous to both landlord and tenant. Nor would the tenant have any great inducement to incur expenditure in permanent improvements under such a tenure—unless the leases were for a long period, and the conditions so stringent as practically to deprive the landlord of any control over his property. The second is, that the laws of primogeniture and entail be abolished, the transfer of land made easy and cheap, so that, like any other commodity, the land might pass freely into other hands, and ultimately come into the possession of those who could make a better use of it than its present owners. This at best would be but a slow, tedious, and, after all, a very unsatisfactory way of meeting the difficulty. First, because the land

would be as much beyond the reach of the actual cultivator as it is at present; secondly, because there is no probability that even if the land changed hands, the claims of the actual cultivator would be considered any more than they are at present; and thirdly, even granting that the plan succeeded to the extent contemplated by some advocates, it would be virtually postponing the remedy to an indefinite period. The Encumbered Estates Act, Sir Robert Peel's measure for the pacification of Ireland, has now been in operation for a quarter of a century, but the land hunger of the Irish people is in no way appeased, and agrarian outrages are as rife as ever. The sale of confiscated land in France at the time of the Revolution, effected an important change, it is true, but the circumstances were totally different from what they are with us at the present day. In France immense quantities of land were thrown upon the market at once, and there could be no competition on the part of the wealthier classes, who were either imprisoned, guillotined, or had left the country; the land consequently was purchased at a low price by the cultivators, who were the only applicants. In England, however, there are no large quantities of land for sale, and even if there were, the competition would be of the keenest, and the land would inevitably come into possession of those classes who would hold it on precisely the same terms as at present. Another plan is that which was proposed by Mr. Bright for Ireland—namely, that the Government should purchase the estates of the great landlords and re-sell to the tenants their present holdings, the tenants to repay the State by yearly instalments. Security of tenure to the cultivator would undoubtedly be obtained by this means, but it is at best but the old cumbersome method over again. It is unnecessary, in the first place, that the cultivator should own the land at all. Secondly, it is undesirable to compel him to buy, as thereby he becomes crippled in his means, the capital required for working his land being absorbed in its purchase. The bad effect of this system is seen in France, where the small freeholds as a rule are heavily mortgaged, and the farmers are impoverished by having to pay a high rate of interest for the use of their money. Thirdly, we doubt if the State would be justified in taking the land from one set of owners and simply handing it over to another set. And lastly, the scheme is objectionable because it provides no guarantee against a reversion of the land to the person from whom it was purchased, and the renewal of the old process of absorption.

There is however a simpler and more efficient plan than any of these. Let the Crown resume possession of the whole of the agricultural and unreclaimed land in the kingdom, and compensate the owner at so many years' purchase at the present

rents. Let it retain possession of the land and lease it, in blocks of from ten to two hundred acres in extent, the leases to be for a period of thirty years. At the expiration of that period, let the land be valued, and if it has increased in value in the interval, whether owing to the enterprise of the tenant or to other causes beyond his control, let him have his lease renewed for another period of thirty years, conditionally on his paying, in addition to the old rent, one-half the value that has accrued since the commencement of his tenure. This plan, we think, would meet all the requirements. The cultivator would have what is so necessary to him, security of tenure, amd ample encouragement afforded him to effect all necessary improvements; the man of small capital would have an opportunity of acquiring a holding suited to his means; while the landlord (*i.e.* the State) and tenant would each receive his fair proportion of the value that might accrue to the land during occupation.

The social advantages of this arrangement would be incalculable. No one who calmly considers our social condition can believe it to be a desirable one. Society in England is now divided into two well-defined classes. On the one side there are those who receive wages, and on the other side those who pay them. At the taking of the last census there were no less than 5,000,000 male adults in the United Kingdom in receipt of wages. Reckoning one male adult to represent a family of four and a half persons* the wages class would thus number 22,500,000 in a population of 29,058,888 persons, being more than two to one of the entire population.† The wages class is thus out of all proportion to the rest of the community. This is both a new and an alarming feature of modern society; for not only does the wages class far outnumber the other sections of the population, but there is also an antagonism between them that formerly did not exist. The old ties of sympathy and common interest which bound together the master and his workman, have been rudely broken. What is the employer's interest is no longer the interest of the workman; the temper of the latter is soured towards his employer, and the employer looks with suspicion on the workman. For years they have been getting farther and farther apart, and now they stand forth in two alarmingly distinct and compact masses. On the one side wealth and influence, and on the other poverty and numbers. As for what are called the

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* The number of persons to a family in 1861 was 4·47 in England, 4·5 in Scotland, and 5·14 in Ireland, giving the average for the United Kingdom as nearly as possible 4·50.

† Mr. Leone Levi's "Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes," p. xxiii.

middle-classes in English society, they have year by year been showing less sympathy with the working classes, and now they openly range themselves on the other side. The wages class hitherto has shown no disposition to lawlessness, for the very simple reason that it has never really felt its power. But with their trade organizations ramifying everywhere, there is no telling when they may both feel and assert it. It is well always to look danger in the face, and try if possible to avert it. In this case the danger can be averted only by restoring the balance of society. The people have been driven from the soil; let them be restored to it, and they will become identified with the progress and prosperity of the country.

There are also economic advantages of the highest order to be considered. High as the price of land in England now is, it cannot be said to have arrived at its maximum value. Gradually, for centuries, we have seen this value increasing; and while we continue to add to our population, and the country remains prosperous, the land will go on increasing in value. It would be absurd to attempt to limit the natural increase of the value of land. And this increase being natural, not artificial, or the result of any effort or expenditure on the part of the landowner, it has become a question with the political economist as to how far the landowner (being a private individual) is entitled to an increase so obtained?* But whatever increases the fertility or productiveness of the soil, or reduces the expenses of cultivation, also increases the value of the land, and both will be secured under the plan we have suggested. (1) There is the subdivision of the large farms into small ones. It is a well-known fact that small farms always command a higher rent than large ones. The subdivision of labour is admitted to be the correct thing in manufactures, and so will subdivision of the soil be found to be in agriculture.†

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* "Suppose there is a kind of income that constantly tends to increase, without any exertion or sacrifice on the part of the owners: those owners constituting a class in the community, whom the natural course of things progressively enriches, consistently with complete passiveness on their part: in such a case it would be no violation of the principles on which private property is grounded, if the State should appropriate this increase of wealth, or part of it, as it arises. . . . . Now this is exactly the case with rent. The ordinary progress of society which increases in wealth, is at all times tending to increase the incomes of landlords; to give them both a greater amount and a greater proportion of the wealth of the community, independently of any trouble or outlay incurred by themselves. They grow richer, as it were, in their sleep, without working, risking, or economizing. What claim have they, on the general principles of social justice, to this accession of riches?"—Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. ii. p. 380.

† "I would here remind you that, in this very neighbourhood, we have testimony that the poor can profitably rent land at 20*l.* an acre. Garden land,

(2) There is the security of tenure afforded by a thirty years' lease, renewable at the end of that period, which would undoubtedly induce the leaseholder to make extensive improvements. (3) There would be no difficulty in obtaining capital on such a tenure. The millions of English capital now let out on doubtful securities abroad would be recalled, and freely invested in improvements at home. An enormous amount of capital might be absorbed in drainage, and other permanent improvements. It has been stated on good authority,* that only two millions out of seventy-seven and a half millions of acres in the United Kingdom are at present drained. That capital so invested would bring in a sure and steady income, and large profit to the investors, there can be little doubt.† (4) Science too will aid in the work of improvement. Agriculture has derived great advantages from scientific discovery during this and the last half century; physiology has taught us how to improve our breeds of cattle and sheep; chemistry has shown us the constituents of the soil, and the mode of supplying the deficiencies of each; and mechanical discovery has furnished us with improved farm implements, and applied steam to the cultivation of the soil. Who can doubt but that we are yet only on the threshold of discovery, and that the next half century will supply results more startling than any we have yet obtained?

Such being the tendency of land to increase in value, why should not the State look forward to this ever-increasing value as a source of revenue? Under a liberal system of land tenure the present rentals of the country might be doubled, or even trebled, in a quarter of a century. This is no mere random assertion, but

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not one quarter of a mile from this room, is let to the poor at 2*s.* and 2*s.* 6*d.* a lug—the most convincing proof that it is worth in profit what we state, from 16*l.* to 20*l.*, for we know that it is good ordinary land which here brings in 30*s.*; and if owners would let the garden land at 30*s.*, the present poor occupier would have a yearly benefit of 18*l.* 10*s.* per acre. Why owners of land should charge the rich man 30*s.* and the poor 20*l.* can only be explained by the universal desire to make as much of property as circumstances permit."—*Lecture read before the Cirencester Chamber of Agriculture, in January last, by the Rev. John Constable, Principal of the Royal Agricultural College, and President of the Cirencester Chamber of Agriculture.*

* Mr. Bailey Denton, before the Rivers Commissioners.

† In an able pamphlet on Agricultural Progress, Mr. James Sanderson says:—"Drainage generally yields from 12 to 20 per cent. In a few instances I have known the total cost repaid by the first crop. As a rule, drainage executed by farmers is unsuccessful, and in nine cases out of ten, where landowners contribute pipes and tenants labour, both labour and material are thrown away. Owners and occupiers, indeed, reap equally satisfactory returns from drainage, the former getting their estates permanently improved without expending one shilling of their own, the latter by paying 7 per cent. interest per annum, realizing in lieu 15 per cent. value."

a moderate estimate. Every one knows that the rental of many farms has been doubled or trebled in a few years' time by drainage alone; and if this can be done on a small scale, why not on a large one? Here, then, is a source of revenue entirely undeveloped. Here is an opportunity for inaugurating free-trade in reality, for, carefully managed, the land revenue in time might become sufficient for all the requirements of the State. Then might customs and excise duties be abolished, and with their abolition, trade and commerce would expand, manufacturing industry increase, every new house or factory erected would be an addition to the capital of the State; every soul added to the population, instead of a burden, would only be the means of increasing the national property. At present the public occupies the position of an improving tenant who is subject to a rack-rent —the more he improves the higher the rent he has to pay. If we cannot escape the rack-rent, let us at least get compensation for our improvements.

There are certain collateral advantages to be derived from the State being the owner of the land, to which we need only passingly refer. Where there is one landlord for all properties, there need be no difficulty about carrying out improvements, when once they have been determined on. Roads, railways, canals, drainage, and irrigation works may be carried through the various holdings without vexatious delay or expensive litigation. Population need not be cooped up in unhealthy nooks and corners because the adjoining proprietor forbids the extension of the town in the only direction in which it is possible. Manufacturers need not be compelled to build their mills in unsuitable localities because landowners object to tall chimneys, but may select those places where labour is cheap and raw material convenient. Some of the most important manufacturing towns in England, Scotland, and Ireland owe their existence to the fact that the land in the locality happened originally to belong to some freeholder who was not averse to dispose of it; and scores of mines that now employ hundreds of thousands of men and millions of capital, were long unopened simply because the great landlords hated contact with a manufacturing population. At whatever point of the question we look, we see the beneficial effects which a change of ownership in regard to the land would have on all classes of the community, the manufacturer and merchant as well as the farmer, the half-starved labourer, and the able-bodied pauper.

The plan which is here proposed for the settlement of this great social and economical question, will no doubt be denounced as revolutionary. Let it be at once frankly acknowledged that it is so, as the term revolution is now generally understood. A revolution is but another name for a thorough reform, and a

thorough reform of our land system is urgently required. It is no use attempting half-measures when whole ones answer better, and are as easily carried. Our late Reform Act, which transferred the government of the country from the landed proprietors (heretofore the real rulers) to the working classes, was a revolution, and that of no ordinary kind; but it requires to be supplemented by another revolution which will rescue the land from its present wasteful and cruel usage, and make it available for the requirements and welfare of the entire community.

We deny that the landowners of this country as a body are entitled to much consideration. They have abused their trust and shirked their responsibilities. They claim that the land should be treated as ordinary property, while they prevent, by their settlements, its being made available for the payment of their just debts. They are grasping and intolerant; to a man they resist any attempt to control them in their dealings with their tenants; they refuse security of tenure to the farmer, which is one of the main elements of productive farming; they prefer subservient tenants to increased productiveness; they harass their tenants by impossible conditions, and plunder them by their game laws, and they see in every labourer a possible encumbrance, and whether as pauper or *prolétaire*, they take good care to get rid of him. They have shown utter heartlessness in clearing their estates of the poor, and gross dishonesty in throwing the burden of their maintenance on others. The Roman patricians, like them, seized the public land and used it for their own pleasure and profit, but as some compensation they threw open the ports and gave free distribution of grain; our patricians, however, not content with a monopoly of the land, long insisted on a monopoly of the market also. As a class they produce nothing, if we except paupers and poachers, and are rather a hindrance in the way of producers than otherwise. Their training and education unfit them for the business-management of their estates, and Irish absenteeism has shown us how little we should lose were they to take themselves off altogether.

At least one man in our century understood the full importance of this subject, and had he lived we need be in no doubt as to the part he would have played in bringing it prominently before the public. In his last speech in the House of Commons Mr. Cobden said:—"If I were twenty-five or thirty years old instead of twice that number, I would take Adam Smith in my hand and I would have a league for free-trade in land as we have had a league for free-trade in corn. There is just the same authority in Adam Smith for the one as for the other, and if the matter were only properly taken up, not as a revolutionary or chartist notion, but as a step in political economy, I believe

success would attend the effort; and I say this, if you can apply free-trade to land and labour too—that is, by getting rid of the abominable restrictions in your parish settlements and the like—then I say the man who does that will have done more for the English poor than we have been able to do by the application of free-trade to commerce." The man who carried the anti-corn-law agitation to a successful issue saw and acknowledged that his work was not half done, that it was only commenced in fact; that a sweeping change in our land system was required; and to accomplish this he was prepared to devote all his energy and all his power of body and mind. Will any one follow in his footsteps and finish the work so nobly begun? Let us only look at this question in all its broad issues, and grapple with it promptly and manfully, as becomes a nation fully conscious of the overwhelming nature of its responsibilities.

THE END.

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Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018